

Rethinking Politics as Statecraft: Wendell Berry Among the Anabaptists

RICHARD J. KLINEDINST*

Abstract: While an increasing number of theologians recognize the inherent tension between a robust ecclesiology and the politics of statecraft, few offer a constructive, embodied political alternative to the dominant ways of ordering life. Wendell Berry's agrarian political vision—his commitment to the local ordering of life in ways that foster the health of the land and its inhabitants—proves deeply instructive to Christians thinking about the inherently political nature of the ecclesial body. Coupled with the theologian William Cavanaugh's story of the rise of the modern nation-state and early Anabaptist conceptions of political life, Berry's vision takes on a new richness. In refusing to treat politics and citizenship in the abstract, distinct from fidelity to certain people, places and communities, Berry offers a stark challenge to the contemporary political order. Berry's insistence that "we love what we particularly know" forces Christians, and especially Anabaptists, to question both the common formulations of American political life and the usual ways of practicing Christian politics. Berry's critique of feminist politics provides one a representative example of this approach.

If we are to hope to correct our abuses of each other and of other races and of our land, and if our effort to correct these abuses is to be more than a political fad that will in the long run be only another form of abuse, then we are going to have to go far beyond public protest and political action.¹

With these bold words, Wendell Berry, the well-known essayist, novelist, poet and farmer, invited readers more than thirty years ago to consider a new approach to political engagement. If we reject a theology that makes it reasonable, even necessary, to destroy each other and the earth, Berry went on to argue, then we must also question the common political formulations that flow from such thinking and we will need to formulate a Christian theology that is "as largely and truly instructive as we need it to be."² Inherent, then, in Berry's Christian agrarian

*Richard J. Klinedinst is a J.D. candidate at Indiana University School of Law-Indianapolis.

1. Wendell Berry, "Think Little," in *A Continuous Harmony: Essays Cultural and Agricultural* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 1972), 76.

2. Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," in *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 96.

philosophy—his commitment to bringing nature, people, economy and culture into a “practical and enduring harmony”³—is a fundamental reformulation of what it means to be political in a postmodern world.⁴

Unfortunately, few Christians today—Anabaptist or otherwise—have offered alternatives to the dominant conceptions of American political life. Most believe, implicitly and in practice, “that there is a vast qualitative difference between the realm we call ‘politics’ and the one we call ‘church.’”⁵ They remain committed to what the theologian Daniel Bell calls “politics as statecraft”—a thoroughly modern belief “that the realm where individuals come together in a polity, a politics, is rightly overseen by and finds its highest expression in the state.”⁶ Yet as Berry’s political vision demonstrates, this commitment to politics as statecraft inevitably leads to a truncated version of Christianity, as it fails to appreciate or embrace the radically political nature of the church’s witness. In short, it disembodies theology by relegating the church to only the internal or spiritual realm of life, and thus allows the state unfettered control of our bodily existence.

Before clarifying how Berry’s alternative to politics as statecraft is relevant to Christians generally and to Anabaptists in particular, this essay juxtaposes early Anabaptist conceptions of the political order with William Cavanaugh’s narrative of the rise of the nation-state—his telling of the “church story” and “state story.” It then critiques contemporary Mennonites who fail to appreciate the radical politics of Christ’s Body and proposes an alternative Anabaptist narrative that illustrates the

3. For more on how Berry envisages local adaptation bringing about a “practical and enduring harmony,” see “The Agrarian Standard,” in *Citizenship Papers* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2004), 143-152.

4. Echoing biblical scholar Ellen Davis, I define agrarianism as “a way of thinking and ordering life in community that is based on the health of the land and of living creatures.” Thus, “often out of step with the prevailing values of wealth, technology, and political and military domination,” Davis goes on to note, “the mind-set and practices that constitute agrarianism have been marginalized by the powerful within most ‘history-making’ cultures.” See her *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1. According to another definition, this one by Jeremy Beer, “Agrarianism posits that the practices associated with the agricultural life are particularly—and in some cases uniquely—well suited to yield important personal, social, and political goods.” In regard to Berry’s work in particular, Beer suggests it is “characterized by humility toward nature and the cosmos, unwavering skepticism toward modern notions of progress, and a practical and epistemological critique of technology.”—Jeremy Beer, “Agrarianism,” in *American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Bruce Frohnen, Jeremy Beer and Jeffrey O. Nelson (Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2006), 18-21.

5. John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1992), vi.

6. Daniel M. Bell Jr., “‘Men of Stone and Children of Struggle’: Latin American Liberationists at the End of History,” *Modern Theology* 14 (Jan. 1998), 115.

ways in which both Christianity and the modern state “are similarly engaged with foundational stories of human cooperation and division.”⁷ The essay makes explicit how any Anabaptist ecclesiology that includes public practices such as economic sharing and the Lord’s Supper shares the same final goal as that of secular statecraft: “salvation of human kind from the divisions which plague us,” namely by “the enactment of a social body.”⁸ This discussion of Anabaptist history and theology invites Mennonites and other Christians to appreciate the provocative and instructive nature of Wendell Berry’s political vision.

ANABAPTISTS AND THE STATE

“Anabaptist political life,” the historian Michael Driedger has suggested, has long been “complex, disputed and dynamic.”⁹ From the authors of the Schleithem Confession to the revolutionaries at Münster, Anabaptists throughout history have approached the issue of church and state in a variety of ways.¹⁰ Arnold Snyder suggests that “historically speaking, five different kinds of political arrangements vis-à-vis Anabaptism can be described.”¹¹ First is the relatively early and rare example of Anabaptism as established religion. Balthasar Hubmaier, for example, made Anabaptism the official religion of Waldshut and Nickolsburg, though neither experiment lasted long. Second, in the infamous uprising, in 1534-1535, in the city of Münster, a group of Melchiorite Anabaptists, sure of the fast-approaching apocalypse, “rejected . . . temporal and spiritual authorities [in order to] to establish their own social, political, and religious rule.”¹² Third, in some settings “Anabaptists were actively hunted down and rooted out by all available means”—what Snyder calls the “zero tolerance” approach to Anabaptism.¹³ Fourth, many German territories proclaimed “an official policy of no tolerance,” but actually implemented “an unofficial policy of

7. William T. Cavanaugh, “The City: Beyond Secular Parodies,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 182.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Michael Driedger, “Anabaptists and the Early Modern State: A Long-Term View,” in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700*, ed. John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 507.

10. To clarify matters, a number of historians have offered typologies on this issue. See, for example, James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, Kan.: Coronado Press, 1976), 329-337.

11. C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 1995), 181-182.

12. Sigrun Haude, *In the Shadow of “Savage Wolves”: Anabaptist Münster and the German Reformation in the 1530s* (Boston: Brill, 2000), 10.

13. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 182.

not looking for trouble.”¹⁴ Finally, there were the rare instances, especially in Moravia, where the state openly tolerated Anabaptist settlers, “although no thought was given to adopting Anabaptism as the ‘official’ territorial religion.”¹⁵

Despite the varied relationship between church and state in early Anabaptism, one fact is clear: “Anabaptism in all its forms, even Hubmaier’s politically moderate brand, was too threatening to the status quo.”¹⁶ As Driedger again observes, “the voluntarism of adult baptism seemed to make participation in the Christian polity a choice rather than a responsibility.”¹⁷ This freedom to choose seemingly undermined “peace and unity in the Empire,” making political authorities all the more willing to “destroy [Anabaptists] with fire, sword, or any other means appropriate.”¹⁸ Early Anabaptism, then, was deeply marked by the oppression it faced from the dominant religious and political forces of the sixteenth century. Though Anabaptists were anarchic revolutionaries only in rare instances, they clearly deviated from the societal and political norms. This deviance resulted in “a spiral of mutual rejection,” in which government oppression actually catalyzed Anabaptist resistance.¹⁹

The story of Anabaptism and the state after the debacle in Münster in 1535 is one of a move from mutual rejection to mutual accommodation.²⁰ As Anabaptists began to worry more about group maintenance and the struggles of ordinary life, they also began to lose “some of the radical resolve of the first years of reforming movements.”²¹ Perhaps the most important impulse behind this shift, however, was the fact that “more and more rulers were searching for new ways to deal with the reality of confessional pluralism,” and so less apt to actively oppress dissenting religious groups.²² Thus, the toleration or cultural assimilation of Mennonites correlated closely with the loss of a radical political orientation. Certainly the move from rejection to accommodation was a complex phenomenon, varying from region to region and group to group. Yet amid this complex process, especially in both the Netherlands and North Germany, increased tolerance and assimilation clearly

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. Driedger, “Anabaptists and the Early Modern State,” 514.

17. *Ibid.*, 515.

18. *Ibid.*, 516.

19. *Ibid.*, 520.

20. *Ibid.*, 520ff.

21. *Ibid.*, 520.

22. *Ibid.*, 521.

entailed a certain domestication of religion by the state, and so too a “political conformity typical of institutionalizing religious groups throughout most of the early modern period.”²³

Several individuals at the “center” of the early Anabaptist tradition felt acutely the tension between church and state, and offered novel approaches for mediating that tension. “In between the extremes of just war and revolution, on the one hand, and Hutterian communalism, on the other,” John Rempel observes, “were Menno Simons and Pilgram Marpeck.”²⁴ Marpeck—who began his Anabaptist career as a civil engineer in Strasbourg and spent the last years of his life in the employment of the city of Augsburg—is especially interesting to modern readers. According to Rempel:

[Marpeck’s] life and thought make the case that Christians ought to take positions of social responsibility in civil society for the sake of the gospel, except where institutions demand absolute loyalty, such as in the command to use violence. At the same time, Marpeck preserved the tension between church and world found in separatist and prophetic stances in Anabaptism.²⁵

In short, despite his belief that faithful Anabaptists could participate in broader societal structures, Marpeck maintained the tension that would later be lost as Anabaptists experienced greater cultural acceptance. While Marpeck recognized a place for government authority, he refused “to grant it any kind of metaphysical autonomy” and evaluated it “in the light of the function that it is to perform in history.”²⁶ By acknowledging the inherent limits of the state, Marpeck “resisted the temptation to merely internalize Christianity,” recognizing that “the state is threatened not so much by individual dissenters as by dissenting communities and countercultures.”²⁷ As Anabaptists realized greater societal toleration and power, however, they largely abandoned Marpeck’s understanding of the relationship between church and state. “The tension of being in-but-not-of the world proved too hard to sustain,” and thus, “in the end, it was the separatists and the realists who were to shape Mennonite history.”²⁸

23. *Ibid.*, 538.

24. John D. Rempel, “Ambiguous Legacy: The Peace Teaching, Speaking Truth to Power, and Mennonite Assimilation Through the Centuries,” in *At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security, and the Wisdom of the Cross*, ed. Duane K. Friesen and Gerald W. Schlabbach (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2005), 355.

25. *Ibid.*, 356.

26. William Klassen, “The Limits of Political Authority as Seen by Pilgram Marpeck,” *MQR* 56 (Oct. 1982), 362.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Rempel, “Ambiguous Legacy,” 357.

RETHINKING CHURCH AND STATE

What nearly all the Anabaptist understandings of church and state shared—from Münsterites to Hutterites to Marpeck—was a sense of some tension between loyalty to Jesus and allegiance to the secular political order. William Cavanaugh, a contemporary Roman Catholic theologian, has carefully narrated this tension, making clear the ways in which the “Christian story” and the “state story” interact and collide. According to Cavanaugh’s account, the creation story in Genesis is one of essential, natural unity: “Not individuals but the human race as a whole is created and redeemed.”²⁹ Yet because of Adam’s disobedience and the Fall, the unity of creation was shattered. “The effect of sin,” Cavanaugh suggests, “is the very creation of individuals as such, that is, the creation of an ontological distinction between individual and group.”³⁰ Redemption or salvation, then, comes about through the incarnation—the “restoring of unity through participation in Christ’s Body.”³¹ Cavanaugh’s interpretation of redemption through the “Body of Christ” is deeply instructive, and thus worth quoting at some length:

In the Body of Christ, as Paul explains it to the Corinthians (I Cor. 12:4-31), the many are joined into the one, but the body continues to consist of many members, each of which is different and not simply interchangeable. Indeed, there is no merely formal equality in the Body of Christ; there are stronger and weaker members, but the inferior members are accorded greater honor (I Cor. 12:22-25). Furthermore, the members of the Body are not simply members individually of Christ the Head, but cohere to each other as in a natural body. The members are not “separate but equal,” but rather participate in each other, such that “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (12:26).³²

In sharp contrast to the Christian story, the story narrating the emergence of the modern state—as told by Rousseau, Hobbes, Locke and others—maintains that human government was established “not on the basis of a primal unity, but from an assumption of the essential individuality of the human race.”³³ Individuals come together not in the Body of Christ, but rather “on the basis of the social *contract*, with each

29. Cavanaugh, “The City,” 183.

30. *Ibid.*, 184.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, 186.

individual entering society to protect person and property.”³⁴ In place of Christ’s Body is Hobbes’s Leviathan, “the new Adam, now of human creation, which saves us from each other.”³⁵ An emphasis on salvation is central to both the Christian and state story, as each “account agrees that salvation is essentially a matter of making peace among competing individuals.”³⁶ Differing understandings of soteriology, however, bring the modern state and the church into sharp tension.

If the primary focus of the church is saving humanity from the disunity of the Fall, the overwhelming concern of the modern state is the disruptive character of competing religious beliefs. Because Christianity “pretends to be a body which transcends state boundaries,” it must be domesticated, lest it disrupt the social contract.³⁷ Thus, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau all agreed “that the state body would have to solve the question of the Body of Christ before there could be true peace.”³⁸ The soteriology of the state assumes that “any association which interferes with the direct relationship between sovereign and individual becomes suspect.”³⁹ The solution requires that the church, along with many other smaller communal attachments, be exiled from public space to the realm of the internal. As Cavanaugh observes, the liberal “principle of tolerance for all religion . . . eliminates the Church body as a rival to the state body by redefining religion as a purely internal matter, an affair of the soul and not of the body.”⁴⁰

However, despite the claims of unity and peace offered by the state, Cavanaugh suggests that the state cannot, in the end, save us. First, the state can never truly reconcile the individual and the group, since “the recognition of our participation in one another through our creation in the image of God is replaced by the recognition of the other as the bearer of individual rights, which may or may not be given by God, but which serve only to separate what is mine from what is thine.”⁴¹ True unity

34. *Ibid.*, 187. Emphasis original.

35. *Ibid.*, 188.

36. Cavanaugh, “The City,” 187.

37. *Ibid.*, 189.

38. *Ibid.*, 188.

39. *Ibid.*, 191.

40. *Ibid.*, 190.

41. *Ibid.*, 192-193. Andrew Bacevich, a historian and international relations theorist, makes essentially the same point regarding the founding of the United States, though I believe he underestimates the extent to which the state domesticates religion, and thus *does* try to offer an alternative soteriology, a secular effort to “save mankind”: “The hardheaded lawyers, merchants, farmers, and slaveholding plantation owners gathered in Philadelphia that summer [of 1776] did not set out to create a church. They founded a republic. Their purpose was not to save mankind. It was to ensure that people like themselves enjoyed unencumbered access to the Jeffersonian trinity—life, liberty and the pursuit of

would threaten the social contract. Second, because humans share no common ends, “the best the state can do is to keep these individuals from interfering with each other’s rights”⁴²—a negative form of peace that is ultimately always contested by individuals asserting their rights. Relating to one another only by contract, “local communities of formation and decision-making are necessarily subsumed . . . under the universal state.”⁴³ Finally, the state’s promise of unity and peace is actually grounded in great violence. Thus, the soteriology of the state “has made it perfectly reasonable to drop cluster bombs on ‘foreign’ villages, and perfectly unreasonable to dispute ‘religious’ matters in public.”⁴⁴ By abstracting individuals from communal attachments, violence becomes a more reasonable option. “In the absence of shared ends,” Cavanaugh concludes, “individuals relate to each other by means of contract, which assumes a guarantee by force.”⁴⁵

ANABAPTISTS AND ALTERNATIVE POLITICS

Keeping Cavanaugh’s story of church and state in mind, it becomes clear that “simply the existence of Anabaptists had a political dimension in the early modern era.”⁴⁶ If one accepts the basic assumptions of politics as statecraft, of course, the Anabaptist faith was not explicitly political. “But,” Driedger helpfully counters, “if we understand politics to include those decisions and actions which contributed to or undermined public order, Anabaptist leaders as well as rank-and-file believers played important political roles in their societies.”⁴⁷

For sixteenth-century Anabaptists, the physical practices of the church—baptism, the Lord’s Supper, mutual sharing—“called for a seriousness of purpose on the part of . . . members that proved an ill fit with the territorial church model.”⁴⁸ The practices of the faith could not be exiled to the private realm because the church was understood as a “historical, ‘public,’ institution and not only a spiritual one; it [was] an alternative community to that of society at large.”⁴⁹ The early Anabaptists, then, were necessarily focused on local and particular

happiness.—Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008), 15-27.

42. Cavanaugh, “The City,” 193.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, 194.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Driedger, “Anabaptists and the Early Modern State,” 538.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 177-178.

49. Rempel, “Ambiguous Legacy,” 354.

communities of voluntary, faithful believers. William Klassen argues that Anabaptists, and especially Marpeck, understood that being a community necessarily meant being “a political entity.” “The Anabaptists were not apolitical,” Klassen writes, “any more than we can be.” He continues:

One of the most political things a group does is to be apolitical. For they saw clearly that in the pattern of God’s history there was a movement from the politics of God who saved his people, to the politics of Jesus who announced the irruption of God’s rule in history, to the politics of God’s people, the church. For that people to remain faithful to the God of history the church has to be visible in history. It prays for the state and participates to the extent that such participation does not violate its deepest loyalty to Jesus their King.⁵⁰

So Anabaptists did have a political presence in the sixteenth century. Moreover, their relationship to the state evolved in a strikingly parallel way to Cavanaugh’s account of the manner in which the soteriology of the state spiritualizes, and thus disembodies, religion. According to Rempel, as the state became more tolerant of a plurality of religious positions, the Anabaptists became “a spiritual community of a different order than the civil or political community and not in contention with it.”⁵¹ In short, with increased freedom of religion and prosperity at the hand of the state, Mennonites “began to believe that pluralist, republican, and capitalist values were biblical,”⁵² and Anabaptists relaxed their view of the church and state in tension with each other.

This transformation is clearly evident among nineteenth-century European Mennonites, especially as “the Napoleonic Code imposed upon Europe a secular legal order with universal rights and obligations.”⁵³ For many Mennonites, these universal rights “became the door to citizenship and equality before the law.” As in Cavanaugh’s narrative, the church increasingly “belonged to a private sphere whereas public life was regulated by institutions according to the norm of reason.”⁵⁴ According to Rempel’s account, “this confinement of the Sermon on the Mount to the private sphere” led to a “spiritualized

50. Klassen, “The Limits of Political Authority,” 363-364.

51. Rempel, “Ambiguous Legacy,” 358. This took place first in the Netherlands and North Germany, and later in other regions.

52. *Ibid.*, 360.

53. *Ibid.*, 359.

54. *Ibid.*, 360.

church" that "blessed worldly institutions as an autonomous realm, unaccountable to the gospel."⁵⁵

Clearly, one finds in Anabaptist history and theology a process of domesticating or spiritualizing the Gospel similar to that described by Cavanaugh. Yet this is not sufficient reason to abandon modern efforts to recover the tension between church and state felt so acutely by early Anabaptists. Although developing such a model will take a great deal of time, effort and commitment, precisely here the Christian agrarian vision of Wendell Berry offers a compelling way forward. Perhaps more than any other social critic writing today, Berry demonstrates the possibility of being in-but-not-of the contemporary world and offers a stark challenge to the regnant political order. His agrarian politics—his alternative to politics as statecraft, coupled with a chastened epistemology and holistic conception of pacifism—prove both amenable and instructive to Anabaptist faith and practice.

WENDELL BERRY'S POLITICAL VISION

According to political theorist Patrick Deneen, two important traditions have shaped American political thought. The dominant tradition, essentially the liberal state story outlined above, operates on the "base assumption that all human motivation arises from self-interest," and further, "privileges the priority of individual choice and economic growth, regardless of consequences to both moral and economic ecology."⁵⁶ The alternative theme, espoused by Berry, looks not to Hobbes, Smith or Locke for inspiration, but rather to classical political philosophy and the biblical tradition.⁵⁷ It is an alternative that

55. *Ibid.*

56. Patrick J. Deneen, "Wendell Berry and the Alternative Tradition in American Political Thought," in *Wendell Berry: Life and Work*, ed. Jason Peters (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 302-303. It is also important to note the way in which this dominant tradition is integrally linked, especially in the United States, to the national security state. Andrew Bacevich suggests that Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama alike share an ideology of national security. "Theirs," Bacevich notes, "is a usable past in which good eventually triumphs as long as America remains faithful to its mission." Thus, it is not surprising that one must accept the terms of this dominant ideology to even enter the debate on matters of politics and citizenship. Again, Bacevich is helpful: "In this way, ideology serves as a device for sharply narrowing the range of policy debate. Dissent, where it exists, seldom penetrates the centers of power in Washington. Principled dissenters, whether paleoconservatives or libertarians, pacifists or neo-agrarians, remain on the political fringes, dismissed as either mean-spirited (that is, unable to appreciate the lofty motives that inform U.S. policy) or simply naïve (that is, oblivious to the implacable evil that the United States is called upon to confront)." — Bacevich, *Limits of Power*, 72-84. The novelty of Berry's vision, I believe, stems from his willing embrace and reformulation of "the political fringes."

57. As Allan Carlson, one of the ablest interpreters of agrarian thought, points out, this tendency to resist the usual political typologies has long been a characteristic of those

values both Aristotle's "stress upon humans as political animals who together participate actively in the life of a polity that aims at the common good," and the Christian tradition's "call to reverence toward the divinely created order . . . [and] its insistence upon self-sacrifice."⁵⁸

Berry's alternative challenges the dominant political order in a number of important ways. First, Berry offers, at least in part, an Aristotelian conception of political life. Both Aristotle and Berry maintain that the whole must govern its constitutive parts. According to Deneen:

While liberalism tends to focus upon and give priority to the various "parts" of nature, including and above all the individual—and hence leads to the foolish belief that those parts can escape the implications of their connection to, and reliance upon, nature—Berry's alternative understanding gives priority to the "whole" and understands all the parts within that context.⁵⁹

Second, Berry recognizes that nature, which "sets the terms of and establishes limits to human undertakings," is an imprecise guide.⁶⁰ Against those, on the one hand, who believe that humans have only an adversarial relationship with nature, and those, on the other, who argue that there is no tension at all, Berry suggests a relationship that is at once hospitable, dangerous and necessary. As Deneen observes, Berry believes that "humans cannot be the conscious 'animals' of the pantheists any more than they can be the self-sufficient 'gods' suggested by those who would establish human dominion over nature."⁶¹

This leads to Berry's rejection of abstract political formulations, most of which ignore any need for the cultivation of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, which is essential to environmental stewardship.⁶² Instead, humans must suit their political and economic practices to local lives and places. "To defend what we love we need a particularizing language," Berry argues, "for we love what we particularly know."⁶³ Humans must

associated with the agrarian mindset. "The New Agrarians represented the one serious attempt in modern America to create a 'third way' in politics, one not easily fit onto the conventional liberal-conservative, or left-right spectrum." —*The New Agrarian Mind: The Movement Toward Decentralist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 5. See also Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

58. Deneen, "Wendell Berry and the Alternative Tradition," 303.

59. *Ibid.*, 304.

60. *Ibid.*, 304-305.

61. *Ibid.*, 305.

62. Deneen, "Wendell Berry and the Alternative Tradition," 306.

63. Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition* (Washington,

ask of their work, "Is this good for us? Is this good for our place?" And further, Berry concludes, "the questioning and answering . . . is minutely particular: it can occur only with reference to particular artifacts, events, places, ecosystems and neighborhoods."⁶⁴

Berry's insistence that "abstraction is the enemy wherever it is found" is central to his conception of the political life.⁶⁵ Berry rejects "abstract national patriotism" — a "mere loyalty to symbols or any present set of officials"⁶⁶ or the idea of the state — in favor of a "local particular patriotism," which "tempers one's allegiance to one's nation, often requiring one to question, or even oppose, state policies that threaten to harm the place and people one loves."⁶⁷ In fact, Berry's privileging of the local and particular over the abstract forces him to acknowledge that he cannot, in good conscience, care more for the United States than for the health of the earth. As he puts it:

My devotion thins as it widens. I care more for my household than for the town of Port Royal, more for the town of Port Royal than for the County of Henry, more for the County of Henry than for the State of Kentucky, more for the State of Kentucky than the United States of America. But I *do not* care more for the United States of America than for the world.⁶⁸

The doorstep and the world, the earth, Berry continues, "are the poles between which a competent morality would balance and mediate." Each is dependent upon the other, and each requires the same consciousness and care.

D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000), 41.

64. Wendell Berry, "Thoughts in the Presence of Fear," in *Citizenship Papers* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2003), 18.

65. Wendell Berry, "Out Of Your Car, Off Your Horse," in *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 23.

66. Wendell Berry, "The Failure of War," in *Citizenship Papers*, 23.

67. Ian and Margaret DeWeese-Boyd, "Flying the Flag of Rough Branch': Rethinking Post-September 11 Patriotism through the Writings of Wendell Berry," in *The Many Faces of Patriotism*, ed. Philip Abbott (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 54-55. There is certainly similarity between Berry's understanding of political obligation and the position held by philosophical anarchists. While Berry would want to challenge most philosophical anarchists' insistence that personal autonomy is always the "primary obligation," he would agree that there is not "a strong moral imperative to oppose or eliminate" the state. Rather, both Berry and philosophical anarchists "typically take state illegitimacy simply to remove any strong moral presumption in favor of obedience to, compliance with, or support for [one's] own or other existing states." See A. John Simmons, *Justification and Legitimacy: Essays on Rights and Obligations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104.

68. Wendell Berry, "Some Thoughts on Citizenship and Conscience in Honor of Don Pratt," in *The Long-Legged House* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 1965), 77. Emphasis original.

To attempt to interpose another moral standard between these two, which I take to be absolute and ultimately the same, is to prepare the way for a power that is arbitrary and tyrannical. To assert that a man owes allegiance that is antecedent to his allegiance to his household, or higher than his allegiance to the earth, is to invite a state of moral chaos that will destroy both the household and the earth.⁶⁹

Regardless of “how sophisticated and complex and powerful our institutions,” Berry reiterates, “we are still exactly as dependent on the earth as earthworms.”⁷⁰ This is an acknowledgment, essentially, that humanity’s “most meaningful dependence . . . is not on the U.S. government, but on the world, the earth,” and finally, on God.⁷¹

Berry’s local and particular conception of patriotism forces his politics to take a certain shape. Too often, he argues, political activists or radicals—people often found protesting, demonstrating and lobbying—expend themselves “utterly in the service of political abstractions,” wrongly assuming that their culpability in violence against the household and the earth “might be expiated in political action.”⁷² In a counterintuitive way, these forms of protest are actually disembodied since they often fail to pay sufficient attention to the fact that violence of all sorts is remedied not “on public platforms, but only in people’s lives.”⁷³ Far too many activists fail to recognize that the most common forms of protest are not necessarily the only or best expression of political engagement, refusing to acknowledge that “there is the possibility of a protest that is more complex and permanent, public in effect but private in its motive and implementation: they can *live* in protest.”⁷⁴

A fundamental insight of Berry’s political vision is that politics as usual—politics as statecraft—creates only a tentative peace. Berry is interested in seeking and maintaining this form of peace, yet he also

69. *Ibid.*, 77-78.

70. *Ibid.*, 77.

71. *Ibid.* Berry goes on to state that “there is no government of which the concern or the discipline is primarily the health either of households or of the earth, since it is in the nature of any state to be concerned first of all with its own preservation and only second with the cost. . . . The government will be the *last* to see the moral implications of man’s dependence on the earth, and the *last* to admit that wars can no longer be fought in behalf of some men but only against all men. Though these realizations have entered the consciences and the lives of certain persons, they have not yet superseded the self-interest of any government.”

72. *Ibid.*, 83.

73. *Ibid.*, 84.

74. *Ibid.*, 86-87. Emphasis original.

insists that it must not be our exclusive interest, for “at best it is only temporary, and it is superficial, achieved always by expediency and always to the advantage of some and to the disadvantage of others.”⁷⁵ Our politics must always recognize that true peace, genuine political reconciliation, is realized only when we abandon a politics of abstraction. Echoing Cavanaugh’s exposition of I Corinthians 12, Patrick Deneen suggests that God allots unique gifts to particular people, “precisely so that humans will come to understand their own partiality as parts of the body and thus come to a better understanding of the whole—both the human community and the human part in divine creation.”⁷⁶ Berry is also keen on this point:

[T]he abstractions of industry and commerce . . . see everything as interchangeable with or replaceable by something else. There is a kind of egalitarianism which holds that any two things equal in price are equal in value, and that nothing is better than anything that may profitably or fashionably replace it. . . . One place is as good as another, one use is as good as another, one life is as good as another—if the price is right. Thus political sentimentality metamorphoses into commercial indifference or aggression. This is the industrial doctrine of interchangeability of parts, and we apply it to places, to creatures, and to our fellow humans as if it were the law of the world, using all the while a sort of middling language, imitated from the sciences, that cannot speak of heaven or earth, but only of concepts. This is a rhetoric of nowhere, which forbids a passionate interest in, let alone a love of, anything in particular.⁷⁷

Berry’s vision clearly challenges both liberal and conservative Christians who “assume that all one needs to do to be a good citizen is to vote and obey and pay taxes, as if one can be a good citizen without being a citizen either of a community or of a place.”⁷⁸ Against those who

75. Berry, “Some Thoughts on Citizenship and Conscience,” 90.

76. Deneen, “Wendell Berry and the Alternative Tradition,” 309.

77. Berry, *Life is a Miracle*, 41-42.

78. Berry, “Some Thoughts on Citizenship and Conscience,” 76. Philosopher Albert Borgmann points out that this is the very conception of citizenship that informs most voters. “The majority of people who do vote,” he suggests, “exhibit the resentful side of sullenness. Sullenness becomes resentful when brooding displeasure and disability take on an aggressive and dismissive aspect. Resentment is sullen in that dissatisfaction does not lead to open and constructive action but rather turns to indirection and obstruction. Although these voters profess to support civil liberties and welfare measures, they finally resent effective measures to help the poor, the powerless, and those out of the cultural mainstream. Their decisive concern and vote is for the vigor and advancement of prosperous inequality; their place in this arrangement is determined by envy for those above and reproach for those below.” See his *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 8.

believe that local communities—ecclesial or otherwise—must translate their “apolitical” message into the dominant political forms of the day, Berry argues that such efforts have led to “the two biggest and cheapest political dodges of our time: plan-making and law-making.”⁷⁹ Far too often, he suggests, such efforts end in a sort of spiritualized protest that fails to attend to the ways in which our bodily lives are bound up in our politics. Such efforts, finally, allow the body politic to displace the Body of Christ.

THE AGRARIAN POLITICS OF GENDER

The depth of Berry’s challenge to the “rhetoric of nowhere” becomes even clearer when his politics is juxtaposed with other, alternative models of political reform. One representative example of his novel approach to politics—his attention to both the particular and the whole—is his deep critique and reformulation of feminist ethics. Although a champion of nonconformist and alternative thinkers around the globe, Berry fares less well in the eyes of many classically liberal feminists. Two decades ago Berry published an essay in *Harper’s* explaining why he was not going to buy a computer. In that short essay, he described his “literary cottage industry”:

My wife types my work on a Royal standard typewriter bought new in 1956 and as good now as it was then. As she types, she sees things that are wrong and marks them with small checks in the margins. She is my best critic because she is the one most familiar with my habitual errors and weaknesses. She also understands, sometimes better than I do, what *ought* to be said.⁸⁰

Central to Berry’s refusal to buy a computer was his rejection of a technological fundamentalism that suggested that becoming a better or more relevant writer required a computer. “I do not see,” he argued, “that computers are bringing us one step nearer to anything that does matter to me: peace, economic justice, ecological health, political honesty, family and community stability, good work.”⁸¹ Berry concluded his short essay with a number of principles to keep in mind when evaluating the appropriateness of technological innovation, thus fleshing out his theoretical argument against buying a computer.

79. Wendell Berry, “Think Little,” in *A Continuous Harmony* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 1972), 77.

80. Wendell Berry, “Why I Am Not Going To Buy A Computer,” in *What Are People For*, 170. Emphasis original.

81. *Ibid.*, 171.

What does an essay on a decision not to buy a computer have to do with feminism and alternative political thought? *Harper's* magazine received twenty letters in response to Berry's short essay, all but three of them extremely critical of his position. Significantly, the sharpest critiques were the letters from feminists accusing him of exploiting his wife. Berry vigorously protested that charge, suggesting that it was indicative of a much broader problem within both environmental and feminist politics: "In order to imply that I am a tyrant, they suggest by both direct statement and innuendo that [my wife] is subservient, characterless, and stupid—a mere 'device' easily forced to provide meaningless 'free labor.'"⁸²

What they fail to consider, however, is Berry's wife *in particular*. By dealing only in abstractions, the writers miss much that is important to know. Might it be, Berry ponders, "that my wife may do this work because she wants to and likes to; that she may find some use and some meaning in it; that she may not work for nothing."⁸³ Much of the problem with modern political thought, Berry argues, is its wish "to monopolize a whole society," thus becoming unable to "tolerate the smallest difference of opinion."⁸⁴ It provides, finally, only a false or vacant unity.

In his essay, "Feminism, the Body, and the Machine," Berry elaborates further on his critique of certain strands of contemporary feminist thought.⁸⁵ He suggests that the modern acceptance of corporate culture—the myth that the liberation of women can be realized if only they get outside the home and into the industrial economy—has led to an uncritical acceptance of a state and economy that actually leaves society's weakest in bondage. If *laissez-faire* capitalism leaves men obviously oppressed by its hierarchy, why then would women seek it as a source of liberation?

How, I am asking, can women improve themselves by submitting to the same specialization, degradation, trivialization, and tyrannization of work that men have submitted to? And that question is made legitimate by another: How have men improved themselves by submitting to it? The answer is that men have not, and women cannot, improve themselves by submitting to it.⁸⁶

82. *Ibid.*, 175.

83. *Ibid.*, 176.

84. *Ibid.*, 175.

85. Wendell Berry, "Feminism, the Body, and the Machine," in *What Are People For*, 178-196.

86. *Ibid.*, 184.

Berry understands an integral connection between the economy, women and local community. To accept as liberation the destruction of local community and oppression by another name is, for Berry, an unacceptable settlement. "It is clear that women cannot justly be excluded from the daily fracas by which the industrial economy divides the spoils of society and nature, but their inclusion is a poor justice and no reason for applause."⁸⁷ The problem with much of feminism, environmentalism and theology alike, Berry argues, is the obviously uncritical, optimistic embrace of an oppressive system that puts its faith in scientific and technological progress. "The problem" he concludes, "is not just the exploitation of women by men. A greater problem is that women and men alike are consenting to an economy that exploits women and men and everything else."⁸⁸

The economy that exploits both men and women inevitably exploits their bodies. In his 1972 book *A Continuous Harmony*, Berry anticipates the ecofeminist arguments that took shape in the latter half of the 1970s.⁸⁹ There, Berry noted "an historical parallel, in white American history, between the treatment of the land and the treatment of women. The frontier, for instance, was exploitative of both."⁹⁰ Much of our disregard for the land, Berry argues, stems from our disdain of material life. Thus, the dualism of body and soul that feminists rally against is also of integral concern to Berry's agrarian politics.

A critique of the modern construction of the individual is, then, central to Berry's agrarian philosophy. Directly opposed to reduction or abstraction, he argues, "is the idea of the preciousness of individual lives and places."⁹¹ This idea—an idea rooted, according to Berry, in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels—"is not derived, and it is not derivable, from any notion of egalitarianism" that stems from science or the state.⁹² Abstract institutions or disciplines are simply incapable of

87. *Ibid.*, 185.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Ecofeminism, considered part of the "third wave" of feminism, attempts to make explicit "the close parallel . . . between the structural oppression of both women and nature through the project of modernity." Throughout the 1960s a number of thinkers were beginning to make such connections, but it was not until 1974 that Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term *eco-feminisme*. See Celia Deane-Drummond, "Creation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 190-192.

90. Wendell Berry, "Discipline and Hope," in *A Continuous Harmony*, 155.

91. Berry, *Life is a Miracle*, 42.

92. *Ibid.* For more on the Christian roots of Berry's emphasis on the preciousness of individual lives and places, see his "Foreword," in Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*. See, for further example, "The Burden of the Gospels," in *The Way of Ignorance: And Other Essays* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005), 127-137; and "The Gift of Good Land," in *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural* (New York: North

recognizing the preciousness of individual lives. The “ancient delight in the individuality of creatures is not the same thing as what we now mean by ‘individualism.’ It is the opposite. Individualism, in present practice, refers to the supposed ‘right’ of an individual to act alone, in disregard of other individuals.”⁹³

Although Berry recognizes the need for a Thoreau-like civil disobedience (and thus a sort of individualism) when working against an unjust system in the name of a communal good, “rugged individualism” generally leads to the oppression of others.⁹⁴ “The tragic version of rugged individualism,” Berry reiterates, “is in the presumptive ‘right’ of individuals to do as they please, as if there were no God, no legitimate government, no community, no neighbors, and no posterity.”⁹⁵ The agrarian political vision necessitates careful consideration of all, especially for the “weakest” within the community, rather than the elevation of one’s self.⁹⁶ For, as Berry reminds us, “if all are equal, none can be precious.”⁹⁷

According to Berry’s agrarian political vision, Christian theology cannot separate concern for local environmental communities from the treatment of the individuals who inhabit them. Thus it is not surprising that Berry has been perennially concerned for the healthy membership of children, women, minorities and the elderly in his agrarian community. Because humans do not exercise total control over creation, fruitful political action must focus on the uniqueness and the particularity of specific humans, not an abstract formulation of humanity or universal rights. Any political vision, in short, must account for both the theory and practice necessary to make real changes in local cultures and

Point Press, 1982), 267-281.

93. Berry, *Life is a Miracle*, 42.

94. J. Matthew Bonzo and Michael R. Stevens call this a “fragile individualism”—an individuality that “has its desires molded by obligations to the other, within the bounds of community. . . . This includes a training of desires and shaping of character, rather than an autonomous pursuit of self-fulfillment.” See their *Wendell Berry and the Cultivation of Life: A Reader’s Guide* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2008), 129-133. The parallels between Berry’s conception of individuality, community, and the formation of desire and recent postmodern theological reflection are striking. See, for example, James K.A. Smith, “The Church as Social Theory: A Reformed Engagement with Radical Orthodoxy,” in *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 219-234.

95. Wendell Berry, “Rugged Individualism,” in *The Way of Ignorance: And Other Essays* (Washington D.C.: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005), 9.

96. Berry believes that it is this challenge precisely—the challenge of living and working “so as not to be estranged from God’s presence in His work and in all His creatures”—that is the true “burden” of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. See his “The Burden of the Gospels,” 127-137; and “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front,” in *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry* (Berkeley, Calif.: Counterpoint, 1998), 87-88.

97. Berry, *Life is a Miracle*, 42.

particular lives, including—perhaps especially—the lives of the weakest within one’s community.

Berry’s thought, then, inextricably links orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This connection is evident in his short essay “The Pleasures of Eating.”⁹⁸ Inevitably after reading Berry’s books or hearing him speak the question arises: “What can city people do?” In truth, the answer is as complex as it is short: “Eat responsibly.” As Berry goes on to state, “eating is an agricultural act.”⁹⁹ Rather than thinking carefully about how our theoretical commitments must impact even our smallest actions, we often play the role of passive, uncritical consumers. Berry argues that if someone else controls our food and its sources, then we are not truly free. “There is then, a politics of food that, like any politics, involves our freedom.”¹⁰⁰ It may seem odd to connect our food politics, on the one hand, and feminist politics, on the other, but Berry suggests that it is not:

But if there is a food politics, there is also a food esthetics and a food ethics, neither of which is dissociated from politics. Like industrial sex, industrial eating has become a degraded, poor, and paltry thing. . . . We hurry through our meals to go to work and hurry through our work in order to “recreate” ourselves in the evenings and on weekends and vacations. And then we hurry, with the greatest possible speed and noise and violence, through our recreation—for what? . . . And all this is carried out in a remarkable obliviousness to the causes and effects, the possibilities and the purposes, of the life of the body in this world.¹⁰¹

Thus, we cannot separate our consumption—the practices of our economic lives—from our political ethic. Indeed, political and environmental ethics must continually shape our practices, our commitments and our understanding of God’s creation. For it is in our smallest individual and communal acts that we begin to recognize our interconnectedness with even the most oppressed among us and with the earth. “Eating with the fullest pleasure—pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance—is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world,” Berry writes. “In this pleasure we experience our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from

98. Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating,” in *What Are People For*, 145-152.

99. *Ibid.*, 145.

100. *Ibid.*, 147. For a succinct account of the politics of eating, see the conclusion to Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 358-374.

101. Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating,” 147.

mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend.”¹⁰²

‘COME ALL YE CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS’

Wendell Berry’s conception of politics and patriotism is deeply instructive to all Christians, but perhaps especially to Anabaptists attempting to resist modernity’s dominant political order. Central to his vision is a radically orthodox, traditionalist critique of the liberal conception of political life.¹⁰³ To those Christians who laud the mythic and impersonal forces of the market and nation-state, Berry poses an essential, if rarely asked, question: “Can we actually suppose that we are wasting, polluting, and making ugly this beautiful land for the sake of patriotism and the love of God?”¹⁰⁴ As suggested above, Berry finds in the liberal tradition “the sort of scientism epitomized in modernity’s ambition to take control of the world by force,” however subtle that force may be, “and with the aid of technologies that mask our fragility and dependence upon others.”¹⁰⁵ But it was precisely this masking of our “fragility and dependence upon others” that enabled early Anabaptists, and Christians generally, to accommodate the state uncritically and to accept a reduced, spiritualized conception of Christian political life.

When Christians accept the proposition that the church—the realm where they come together, their politics—must be disciplined or subsumed by the state, they take on a different understanding of what it means to *be* political. “It is clearly possible that, in the condition of the world as the world now is,” Berry suggests, “organization can force upon an institution a character that is alien or even antithetical to it.”¹⁰⁶ The church that accepts the notion of politics as statecraft takes on different responsibilities. “The *organized* church,” Berry continues, “comes immediately under a compulsion to think of itself, and identify itself to the world, not as an institution synonymous with its truth and its membership,” but rather as a body that “makes peace with a destructive

102. *Ibid.*, 152.

103. See generally, Wendell Berry, “Against the Nihil of the Age,” *Sewanee Review* 109 (Fall 2001), 542-563, and Berry, *Life is a Miracle*. See also Jeremy Beer, “Wendell Berry and the Traditionalist Critique of Meritocracy,” in *Wendell Berry: Life and Work*, ed. Jason Peters (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 212-229.

104. Wendell Berry, “Compromise, Hell!” in *The Way of Ignorance*, 23.

105. Norman Wirzba, “The Dark Night of the Soil: An Agrarian Approach to Mystical Life,” *Christianity and Literature* 56 (Winter 2007), 262-263. For more on how the transnational market and its “technology of desire” has become the “new empire” — that is, how capitalism and the market now wield the expansive power once held by the state — see Daniel M. Bell Jr., *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001).

106. Wendell Berry, “God and Country,” in *What are People For*, 95.

economy and divorces itself from economic issues because it is economically compelled to do so.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, for the church that depends on the fruits and toleration—the tithes—of a destructive political and economic order, “the disembodiment of the soul becomes the chief of worldly conveniences.”¹⁰⁸

Philosopher Norman Wirzba suggests that “through scientific and economic reductionism the intellect has become blind.”¹⁰⁹ Increasingly, it has become difficult for Christians to imagine or foster alternative possibilities of embodied political life. Though our intellect looks for alternatives to relationships enabled only by social contract, “it no longer sees truly since it has lost the imagination to see the sanctity of created things or the vast and indescribably complex memberships of which they and we are but one part.”¹¹⁰ Berry’s alternative political vision helps us re-imagine the complexity of our memberships and, in so doing, points to concrete, embodied practices that enable real change, genuine liberation, in the lives of those who seriously commit to a particular community and way of life. It is this emphasis on embodied practice that makes Berry’s political vision a fuller and more nuanced critique of our current economic and political structures than most other political theologies. It is the emphasis on embodiment, finally, that makes his alternative politics so compelling.

It is only in real and particular communities where liberating practices take place—where the interrelated fate of both communal membership and the earth are deeply valued—that one finds a compelling alternative to politics as statecraft. And when this alternative is materially instantiated in the particularity of our daily lives we have little choice but to secede from an uncritical union of church and state. In “The Mad Farmer, Flying the Flag of Rough Branch, Secedes from the Union,” Berry poetically echoes both Marpeck and Cavanaugh by calling for a truly Christian politics that takes seriously how Christ’s Body might impact our own, and thus offers a stirring reminder of its disruptive yet reconciling purpose:

Come all ye conservatives and liberals
who want to conserve the good things and be free,
come away from the merchants of big answers,
whose hands are metalled with power;
from the union of everything and everywhere
by the purchase of everything from everybody at the lowest price,

107. *Ibid.*, 95-96. Emphasis original.

108. *Ibid.*, 96.

109. Wirzba, “The Dark Night of the Soil,” 263.

110. *Ibid.*

and the sale of anything to anybody at the highest price;
from the union of work and debt, work and despair;
from the wage-salary of the helplessly well-employed.

From the union of self-gratification and self-annihilation,
secede into care for one another
and the good gifts of Heaven and Earth.

Come into the life of the body, the one body
granted to you in all the history of time.
Come into the body's economy, its daily work,
and its replenishment at mealtimes and night.
Come into the body's thanksgiving, when it knows
and acknowledges itself a living soul.
Come into the dance of community, joined
in a circle, hand in hand, the dance of the eternal
love of women and men for one another
and of neighbors and friends for one another.¹¹¹

111. Wendell Berry, "The Mad Farmer, Flying the Flag of Rough Branch, Secedes from the Union," in *Entries: Poems* (New York: Counterpoint, 1997), 39-41.